

Inspection of a good school: St John's Church of England Primary School

Coombe Avenue, Weymouth, Dorset DT4 7TP

Inspection dates:

22–23 January 2020

Outcome

St John's Church of England Primary School continues to be a good school.

However, inspectors have some concerns that standards may be declining, as set out below.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy school. They feel valued and cared for because leaders and staff know them well and want the best for them. Staff create calm and nurturing classrooms, which help pupils to settle well into their learning. The 'vision vessel', which leaders have displayed across the school, helps to make clear the school's values of truthfulness, friendship, forgiveness, courage, compassion and respect.

Pupils tackle learning with enthusiasm and demonstrate a thirst for knowledge. However, some younger pupils struggle to read and write. While most eventually catch up, this takes too long.

Pupils behave well, both in lessons and around the school. They are proud of their achievements and demonstrate a conscientious attitude towards their learning. Pupils feel safe and know what to do if they have a worry or concern. Pupils told me that behaviour is a strength of the school. They recognise that some may find it difficult to manage their behaviour, but staff are on hand to help. Pupils are adamant that bullying does not occur.

Pupils' attendance is improving. Leaders have introduced incentives to promote good attendance which are beginning to have an impact. Leaders closely track pupils' attendance and support pupils who struggle to attend regularly, and help their parents. However, the proportion of pupils who frequently miss school remains high.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders and governors have overseen several changes since the previous inspection. The school has since joined the Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust and there have been several changes to staffing. Leaders have nurtured a cohesive staff team who support their vision for the school. As a team, they have achieved success, such as external recognition for the quality of religious education across the school. However, there are

aspects of the school's curriculum which are further behind, including phonics and ensuring that children get off to a flying start. Leaders, governors and trust representatives know what they must do. However, their actions have not led to the necessary improvements.

Year 1 pupils' attainment in the phonics screening check has been in the bottom 40% of all schools nationally in recent years. Too few children get off to a good start with their phonics and some fall behind quickly. The quality of the phonics curriculum remains too variable to help children to keep up. Pupils are working at different stages of the phonics programme, but staff are not adapting curriculum plans to reflect this. Interventions are available for those who need to catch up, but this is not proving effective for all pupils. Those that have fallen behind have underdeveloped writing as their phonic knowledge is not yet secure. This causes them to spell words inaccurately.

Most pupils' phonic knowledge does eventually improve but this does not happen quickly enough. Pupils, particularly those in key stage 2, who have completed the school's phonic programme, talk enthusiastically about their favourite books and authors. Their writing also improves.

Leaders are reviewing the curriculum for science and the foundation subjects. They have opted to stagger this work rather than do it all at once. Staff told the inspector they appreciate this, as it shows leaders are considering their workload. Leaders are making changes because teachers are not able to give subjects the time they need and are not sequencing lessons well enough. The reviewed curriculum plans for science are comprehensive and taking root in classrooms. Pupils enjoy these lessons as they build on what they already know. Leaders have considered how best to arrange the curriculum to help pupils know more and remember more. Teachers are bringing these plans to life, although this is still in its infancy.

The special needs coordinator (SENCo) has clear systems in place for supporting pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). She helps teachers when they set targets for pupils. Most of these are high-quality and match pupils' needs precisely. However, occasionally the curriculum is too challenging and pupils struggle.

Pupils show an awareness of different cultures and faiths. One pupil, whose view represented the view of others, told me they respect the opinion of everyone at the school, even if their beliefs are different to their own. Pupils know right from wrong and follow the school's Christian values.

Over time, the proportion of children meeting expectations for their age by the end of the Reception Year has been below national averages. School leaders have made changes to the Nursery class to help children get off to a strong start; this work is beginning to pay off. In the Reception class, current children have not benefited from the recent improvements to the Nursery provision. Many children struggle, particularly in reading and writing. Adults have created a calm, caring environment which promotes children's independence but there is more to do if children are going to be well-prepared for key stage 1.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have ensured that staff have the training they need to identify pupils that may be at risk of harm. They keep a watchful eye on records to ensure that training is complete and up to date. Staff record concerns they have about pupils on the school's electronic system. Leaders review these concerns regularly and take proportionate action. At times, they share information with the local authority to seek advice or support. They do so at appropriate points. Leaders make sure all adults have been subject to robust recruitment procedures, so they can satisfy themselves that they only appoint staff who are suitable to work with children.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders are introducing new curriculum plans for science and the foundation subjects. Leaders have designed an effective science curriculum, which teachers have recently started to follow. Foundation subjects are next. Curriculum leaders will need support to develop these plans, so they are of the same high standard as seen in science. Once this work is complete, curriculum leaders will need to check that teachers are implementing these plans well enough, so pupils know more and remember more in these subjects.
- For the previous three years, Year 1 pupils have attained lower than national averages in the phonics screening check. Current pupils do not get off to a quick enough start and some quickly fall behind. While most pupils catch up, staff do not routinely ensure that pupils have high-quality opportunities to learn letters and the sounds they make well enough. Teaching staff need to keep a closer eye on pupils' phonic understanding to check that they are keeping up and adapt curriculum plans, both in class and during interventions, to ensure they match pupils' needs.
- Pupils' slow start in phonics is having an impact on the quality of their writing. Younger pupils require significant catch-up because they struggle to spell words correctly. While some pupils' spelling increases in accuracy, others find it hard to spell beyond the first sound in a word. As a result, pupils' writing can be difficult to read. Leaders must make sure expectations for younger pupils are as high as elsewhere in the school, so they get off to the strongest possible start.
- Pupils' absence rates are slightly higher than national averages, while persistent absence is higher still. Leaders have incentives to promote pupils' strong attendance. They support families whose children's attendance requires improvement. Leaders must continue this work so that pupils attend well.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, St John's Church of England Voluntary Aided School, to be good in April 2015.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	144550
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10125233
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	233
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Graham Exon
Headteacher	Amanda Aze
Website	http://www.stjohns.dsat.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Ofsted inspected the predecessor school in April 2015 and judged it to be good. In July 2017, the school joined the Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust.
- The academy trust has delegated certain responsibilities to the local governing body. There are opportunities for the local governing body and trustees to share information with one another. The trust's director of education uses this information to determine the support the school needs.
- The school has a Nursery class, which caters for children aged between two and four years old.
- The school is arranged into single-form entry year groups, except for Year 5 which has two classes.

Information about this inspection

- I conducted deep dives in reading, science and geography during the inspection. I met with senior leaders and curriculum leaders, considered work in pupils' books, carried out lesson visits, and spoke with pupils and teachers. I also spent time looking at pupils' writing with senior leaders.

- I spoke with the chief executive officer (CEO), director of education and a trustee from the Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust. I also met with representatives from the local governing body, including the chair of the governing body.
- I considered information the school provided about behavioural incidents and records of exclusions. I also analysed pupils' attendance when I met with leaders.
- I met with the SENCo. I looked at pupils' plans and the quality of targets. I evaluated how well staff meet the needs of pupils with SEND during deep dives and separate book scrutiny.
- I considered responses to Ofsted Parent View. I also looked at responses to the staff and pupil surveys. In addition, I also spoke with staff and pupils during the inspection.
- I met with the designated and deputy designated leader for safeguarding. We discussed how well they identify pupils who may need early help or are at risk of harm, secure the help that pupils need and manage staff recruitment.

Inspection team

Nathan Kemp, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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